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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON FIGHTING IN KALMA CAMP, SOUTH DARFUR

REF: KHARTOUM 1289

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SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) BEGIN SUMMARY: On August 25, USAID staff received reports of fighting and casualties in Kalma internally displaced person (IDP) camp, South Darfur (REFTEL). UNAMID stated that armed IDPs had set up human shields and fired first on GOS forces assembled outside the camp, and UNAMID managed to respond with Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) and police in the afternoon following the incident. On August 26, USAID received additional information regarding the casualties, residents fleeing the camp, and emergency needs within the camp's facilities. USAID will continue to monitor the situation, and will provide updates as additional information becomes available. END SUMMARY.

THE SITUATION IN KALMA: WOUNDED, DEAD, AND SURROUNDED

¶2. (SBU) All reports indicate that fighting in Kalma camp ceased around midday on August 25, although the government maintained and later reinforced a heavy military presence around the camp. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), throughout the day on August 25, the Sudanese government forces, including police and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), refused entry to international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) trying to access the camp in order to help injured residents. Additional reports indicate that government troops were simultaneously trying to remove dead bodies from the camp by force.

¶3. (SBU) By 1200 hours on August 25, USAID's implementing partner, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), reported that its clinic housed at least 64 injured camp residents and three dead. At 1500 hours, IRC clinic staff reported 39 seriously wounded patients with gunshot injuries and fractures. In addition, the clinic was running out of IV fluids and antibiotics, and staff reported six patients in

critical condition and in need of an emergency evacuation. By 1700 hours, the clinic had 5 dead civilians. As of 1900 hours, IRC staff reported that UNAMID forces had accessed the clinic and transported the six critical patients out of Kalma. Throughout the day, additional IRC staff tried to gain access to assist their overwhelmed coworkers; however, Sudanese forces prevented any NGO access to the camp.

¶4. (U) Exact numbers of deaths and injuries are conflicting and unverified; however, according to one UN source, the fighting killed 32 people and injured 105 camp residents. The same UN source identified the incident as a "full armed confrontation" between SAF and IDP residents of Kalma camp. In addition, international news agencies are reporting that thousands of Kalma's residents fled from the camp and into the desert in order to escape the shooting.

¶5. (SBU) Medecins Sans Frontieres/Holland (MSF/H) reported that MSF/H staff treated more than 65 shooting victims, mainly women and children, in its medical clinic in the camp. MSF/H also reported that Government of Sudan (GoS) forces tried to prevent MSF/H staff from entering the camp, and as of 1700 hours on August 25, the GoS deployed additional army and police forces to Kalma. After gaining access to the camp at 1800 hours, UNAMID and MSF/H evacuated 45 of IRC and MSF/H's most critical patients to a hospital in nearby Nyala. On August 26, MSF/H sent a team to Kalma to assist with burying the deceased.

¶6. (U) As of 1200 hours on August 26, international news sources quoting camp residents indicated that government troops had reinforced positions around the camp overnight and may be preparing for a second attack. In addition, camp residents and armed opposition group members offered casualty numbers including 46 dead and 118 injured from the firefight.

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HUMAN SHIELDS SET UP BY ARMED IDPS: UNAMID

¶7. (SBU) UNAMID Chief of Staff John Alstrom met with Poloffs at UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher on August 26 and offered a clearer explanation of events that led up to the outbreak of hostilities between IDPs and GOS forces on August 25. According to Alstrom, GOS police had surrounded the camp the previous evening, with the intent to search it, but heavy rains forced them to retreat and return the next morning. Tipped off that authorities intended to enter and search Kalma, agitators within the camp assembled a group of human shields, mostly women and children, in the early morning of August 25, and fired first from inside the camp on GOS forces assembled outside. . As the fighting escalated, GOS forces did not enter the camp, but continued shooting from outside. UNAMID responded with a convoy of armored personnel carriers, police and military staff from El Fasher that, after encountering roadblocks, arrived at Kalma camp that afternoon to assess the events and estimate casualties. Although UNAMID is unable to confirm the varying reports of numbers of dead or wounded, Alstrom did say that some reports coming from inside the camp may be exaggerated.

¶8. (SBU) Kamal Saiki, director of UNAMID Public Information, expressed concern in a meeting with Poloffs on the humanitarian principle that if IDPs are armed, they can no longer be classified as IDPS, but must be considered combatants. Saiki believes the event to have been orchestrated by the Wali of South Darfur and local police authorities, noting that Khartoum has been helpful in cooperating with UNAMID as of late.

INTERNATIONALS CONDEMN, LOCAL AUTHORITIES DEFEND

¶9. (U) On August 25, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator issued a press statement condemning the incident in Kalma camp. In the UN statement, the Humanitarian Coordinator called for restraint and the immediate establishment of a humanitarian corridor to allow for the evacuation of the wounded. On August 26, the UN Humanitarian

Coordinator met with the South Darfur Wali and indicated that the UN and international community do not welcome the actions taken on the part of the GoS. In addition, the Humanitarian Coordinator reiterated that a humanitarian corridor must be established in order to assist people and underscored that UNAMID should maintain the corridor. On August 26, the UN sent UNAMID police and military forces to patrol Kalma camp to confirm details of the incident and to provide assistance.

¶10. (SBU) On August 26, U.S. Embassy in Khartoum released the Department of State's August 25 press statement condemning the SAF's indiscriminate weapons fire and calling upon the GoS to investigate the incident and ensure that such actions are not repeated and delivered it to Ambassador Eltayeb, Director of the Peace Institute of the MFA. Eltayeb expressed skepticism that GoS forces used indiscriminate force and said that judgments on the incident should await a full investigation.

¶11. (U) On August 25, the SAF issued its own statement on the Kalma incident, claiming that the GoS carried out the operation in order to seize weapons stored at the camp and that government forces were ambushed by camp residents and thus returned fire. In addition, the statement contended that the Darfur IDPs planned to use such weapons to carryout sabotage operations and target government forces (Note: SAF Statement has been sent via email to SPG. End Note.) In the past, the GoS has raided Kalma, claiming that IDP residents use the camp as a base for recruitment, opposition, and weapons storage. The SAF statement also confirms that forces will continue to "besiege" the camp in order to collect weapons, prevent armed opposition group access, and impose government sovereignty.

¶12. (SBU) According to August 26 phone conversations between USAID staff and NGO representatives, NGOs are calling on the government and all armed actors to allow a humanitarian corridor that would allow humanitarian agencies safe access to treat and/or evacuate those who need medical care. Additionally NGOs are calling on

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UNAMID to deploy the formed police unit and civilian police to provide 24 hour presence within the camp. They are also asking UNAMID for 24 hour military patrols along the perimeter of the camp. US Embassy staff currently in El Fasher will meet with UNAMID on August 27 and plan to discuss the issue further.

BACKGROUND

¶13. (U) Kalma camp is home to between 90,000 and 100,000 IDPs from 29 different ethnic groups. In recent months, Kalma camp has been a flashpoint for nearly every chronic and reoccurring problem in Darfur. Whether problems of bureaucratic impediments, fuel and water shortages, seasonal flooding, or government raids, the camp continues to make headlines on a weekly or daily basis.

¶14. (SBU) On August 25, UNAMID received a letter in Arabic from the GoS Police stating that the GoS had a search warrant authorizing police to enter Kalma camp. The warrant was effective as of August 24 and authorized GoS forces to search the camp for weapons and wanted persons. The letter served as UNAMID's notice that the GoS expected UNAMID assistance and accompaniment for this exercise.

¶15. (SBU) Shortly after GoS delivered the letter, UNAMID received a call from the sheikhs (local leaders) of Kalma camp who reported that the GoS had positioned more than 30 vehicles of personnel at a checkpoint to the IDP camp. By 0900 hours, the leaders reported that the vehicles had increased to more than 80 and camp residents reported that the GoS personnel were shooting randomly into the air.

¶16. (SBU) According to USAID field staff, on August 21, GoS forces raided Kalma camp and removed weapons from two IDP houses. This raid followed an incident during the week of August 18 when National Security (NISS) and SAF military intelligence forces at the Mojuck checkpoint 8 km from Nyala detained 11 IDPs en route to Kalma. Although the IDPs were later released, according to UNAMID, the

detainment was arranged after the government forces alleged the discovery of arms in Kalma camp.

COMMENTS

¶17. (SBU) In the past year, the GOS has been quite public in its desire to close Kalma camp and disperse the camp's residents. Despite this, the question of who is guilty of provoking this particularly deadly encounter between the SAF and armed IDPs remains in dispute. The issue of armed IDPs presents the international community with yet another source of instability in Darfur. While UNAMID recognizes that it needs to do more to prevent such incidents, it continues to have limited capacity to respond once these violent conflicts erupt.

ASQUINO